

## Rum and the Coming Dry Rot

By BENJAMIN DE CASSERES.

A NEW book by Marian Cox is, in America, a literary event—a literary event in contradistinction to the mere publication of a new book.

Marian Cox is one of the few great feminine writers of English. She has a lucid style because she has individualized her mentality. She has that rare gift among women—irony. She has vision. She mocks, she scorns, she pities. She thinks without sinking into mere philosophizing. She unmasks and passes. Her vision is steady, her hand sure. She scintillates with the electric fuses of Latin.

She has a beautiful wisdom. She can go submarining with the fertile thinkers of the ages, bring her Pegasus to a halt in front of the sun without being scorched, or paddle around lightly and unconcernedly in the rippling lakes of everyday life. Her *The Crowds and the Veiled Woman* (published a few years back) is one of the most beautiful and profoundly stimulating books ever written. Its beauty is drastic, its irony overwhelming; its brilliance soars. We wonder whether the late Remy de Gourmont ever read it. It might be placed next to his own *Sixtine*.

Mrs. Cox's new volume is called *The Dry Rot of Society*. It is a slim volume and contains five essays—*The Dry Rot of Society*, *The Fools of Love*, *The Lady in War*, *The Gentleman in War*, *The Great Fear in Germany*. They are all powerful sidelights on things of the hour, but written from her own ironic position. In the garden of ideas she is always examining the roots and buds. Her style is the perfume.

*The Dry Rot of Society* is a psychological examination of the prohibition craze. Alcohol, occasional excess, is a root-need of the human being. It is one of his excuses for not committing suicide. It is the instinct to see the world and ourselves

topsy-turvy every once in a while. It is a means of "letting off steam," of giving the ape and the angel in us a breath of air. Reality has no kick in it. He is dead beyond all resurrection who hath not been a fool, and he is still-born who does not love to be a fool occasionally and grin at himself in the mirror of his absurd seriousness.

The ancients were wise. Rome had so many restrictions that hemmed in the activities of her citizens that Seneca recommended an occasional debauch for all law-makers and citizens. The Saturnalia was ordained, periods of official spleen, when everybody tore up his income tax blank and put a dunce cap on the Mayor. If you want to keep people from guillotining let them get drunk every little while and imagine they are kings, mayors, spendthrifts and lawmakers for a day.

These were "holy days for the unholliness of the people." Our own staid William James advised a "moral holiday" for everybody in order to keep the balances. Herbert Spencer tells us somewhere to "upset the equilibrium" on stated occasions.

Says Mrs. Cox: "The drunkard drinks with a mystic hankering that makes his toast like an unutterable prayer that he may feel one with the gods for one glorious moment of their sun soaked eternity. He drinks to escape himself and the sober, stone-eyed world which has hitched all his little stars to a treadmill, a petticoat or a plow." All the tragedies of history were invented in the brains of sober people.

*The Fools of Love* is a brilliantly written analysis of woman's besetting sin—her subliminal love-anarchy. "Love has become woman's Olympian madness, her sublimated folly, her voluptuousness of self-destruction. . . . Even the sufferings of love have come to form part of its morbid attraction to her. She revels in fastings, scourgings, confessions, forgiveness of sins, penances, ceremonials, communions and symbolism of flesh and spirit in the orthodoxy of human passion. . . . All 'intellectual women' die of a broken heart," says Mrs. Cox. There is no escape from the furies of sex. The woman mathematician, the woman artist, the woman chemist, do not really exist; they are roads to the eternal Tristram. The philtres of Brangane were mixed by Eros and Mephistopheles.

*The Lady in War* is a study in one of the most striking phenomena of the great war—the rise of the Amazon. Woman follows the man up to the mouth of the howitzer. "To smile and smile, be a villain is the consummate paradox of feminine nature. . . . The essential virtues of a soldier are suggestibility and automatism; and in these qualities the raw, unfashioned female excels the male." There was the Russian Battalion of Death. There are the Furies of Suffrage. And further back, Jezebel and Joan of Arc.

*The Gentleman in War* advances the opinion that England is unconquerable because England is a race of gentlemen. Prussia cannot conquer gentlemen. Where there are gentlemen there are conquest and strength. "The war, in one aspect, can be seen as a combat between the real gentlemen of England and the sham noblemen of Germany. . . . In Germany there is no national word for 'gentleman' or 'character.' . . . When the German lost his gentle instinct he lost his empire." This essay is a fine tribute to England, at whose head have been hurled more stupidities than she has ever been guilty of.

*The Great Fear in Germany* is a masterly study of crowd-insanity—to me the finest essay in the book. Modern Germany is the greatest psychological phenomenon in the world's history, for it is the only instance of a whole people going totally insane of which we have any knowledge. It was the revival of the "Great Fear" of the Middle Ages as it affected a race. "Life is an epileptic fit between two Nothings." At least it would seem so in Germany.

As Charles Ferguson said, "This book is an exciting adventure." It is a carnival of ideas and fiery phrases.

THE DRY ROT OF SOCIETY. By MARIAN COX. Brentano's. \$1.25.

"How many people among us," rhetorically demands the *Liverpool Daily Post*, "could name half a dozen living American novelists of distinction? One mentions Mrs. Wharton, Owen Wister, Winston Churchill, and then the list ends. However, the *Liverpool Daily Post* is graciously pleased to have heard of Mr. Hergesheimer.



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